REINSTATEMENTS AFTER FIRE.

With regard to a dwelling-house in Wellington-street, Woolwich, partially destroyed by fire, a joint requisition was submitted by the district-surveyor, and Mr. Jennings on the part of the Guardian Insurance Office, setting forth as follows:—"Whereas, the whole of the internal constructions have been so far destroyed as to render it necessary to reinstate the same with new, and such, moreover, is the proposal and intention of the said Joseph Jennings, and also to take out the brestsummer under the front wall of the said dwelling-house.

And, whereas, it is the opinion of the said George Aitchison (the district surveyor), that the external and party-walls are not in so ruinous and dangerous a condition, as to warrant the said George Aitchison in requiring that they be pulled down and rebuilt.

And, whereas, it is the opinion of the said George Aitchison that the proposed reinstatements of the chief parts of the said dwelling-house is virtually a rebuilding of the said house, and that under Section 5 of the said Act, the external and party-walls must be rebuilt of the height and thicknesses shewn in Schedule C, part 2, of the said Act, and in conformity in every respect to any other rules therein affecting their constructions.

And, whereas, it is contended by the said Joseph Jennings that the proposed reinstatement is only to be regarded as a repair, and that he is only bound to take care in performing such repairs, that nothing be done which would render the said dwelling-house less comformable to the aforesaid Act than it was heretofore, or admitting, that under Section 5 of the said Act, the building in question must be repaired in accordance with the schedules of the said Act, that he is not bound to remove or alter (by pulling down) existing walls or other constructions, but merely to make such additions as will make the new works conformable to the said Act; as, although in Schedule D, part 2, in the clause relative to the materials to be used in rebuilding, it is enacted, that when one-fourth of the whole surface of an external wall is taken down, every part thereof must be rebuilt according to Act, that as no part of such walls is taken down, the premises cannot be considered to be rebuilt."

The award was, that "inasmuch as the inclosing walls of the building in question remained sound, we, the said official referees, do hereby determine and award, that the works in question may be done in the manner proposed by the said Joseph Jennings in the said requisition, and that it will not be contrary to the said Act to allow the said walls to remain."

The costs to be paid by Mr. Jennings.

FOUNDATIONS—UNDERPINNING.

The surveyor of the western district of the city of London lodged an information against Mr. Southgate, for making sundry alterations in a house, 170, Fleet-street, contrary to the provisions of the Act: that is to say:—"First, in excavating a part of the basement story of the said premises to an additional depth of about three feet, and adding to the foundations of the surrounding walls by underpinning; such additional foundations not being properly constructed in relation to the width of the footings of such walls; and secondly in commencing such work without previous notice to the district surveyor, as required by the said Act."

The referees awarded, "that notice ought to have been given to the surveyor of the district, and that the works in question have not been done in conformity with the said Act, and by this our award we do hereby direct that the building owner do forthwith, at his own expense, shore up the walls in question and underpin the same to their full thicknesses, and to the full depth of the excavations on solid foundations with proper footings, and in all other respects in conformity with the directions of the Metropolitan Buildings Act."

Costs of office and surveyor's costs to be paid by Southgate.

WALLS ABOVE ROOF OF ADJOINING HOUSE.

Mr. Sissons, of Notting Hill, and the surveyor of the Hammersmith district, requested the decision of the referees on the following matter, respecting which a doubt had arisen:—"In the case of adjoining houses, some of higher elevation than others, with respect to the walls used or built in order to be used, as a separation of two or more houses, are those portions of the said walls which are above the roofs of the lower buildings, still to be considered 'party-walls,' and, in consequence, required to be finished in conformity with the rules in Schedule D, part 3, 'Height of party-walls above roof.'"

The referees decided, that they must "be considered as party-walls, and as such must be built and finished in every respect in conformity with the rule in Schedule D, part 3, of the Metropolitan Buildings Act, headed, 'height of party-walls above roof,' and all the other rules regulating the construction of party-walls in the said schedule."

A NEW MATERIAL

FOR CONSTRUCTIONAL AND DECORATIVE PURPOSES.

We have recently examined, in the manufactory of Messrs. Keen and Co., York-street, Lambeth, through the kindness of Mr. T. Lahee, one of the firm, a natural resin or mastic, recently imported from the East Indies for the first time, which appears to be applicable, with great advantage, to many uses in the constructive and decorative arts. It is called GUTTA PERCHA, and is somewhat like India-rubber or caoutchouc, but it is advantageously distinguished from it in its freedom from stickiness when dry, in its not being so affected by atmospheric heat, or by unctuous oils, and in its being workable by means of hot water alone.

Some of its properties are stated to be:—That it is soluble in essential oils, but resists to a great extent the action of grease and unctuous oils: it mixes readily with paints, pigments, and most other colouring matters: it is repellent of, and unaffected by cold water or damp: it may be so softened by mere immersion in hot water, or by exposure to steam or hot air, as to be capable without further treatment of being kneaded, or moulded, or rolled out, or pressed into any desired shape, and to any extent of tenuity: it is of a strongly adhesive or agglutinating quality, and when dry is free from stickiness: in the dry or solid state it is flexible, of great tenacity, and to a slight degree elastic: it is impermeable to, and not injuriously affected by atmospheric air: in a pure state is nearly inodorous, and it is little, if at all, injured by use (except as a fuel), and may, after it has been employed in a manufactured state, be recovered or renovated, and manufactured anew.

The patentee gives the following exemplification of the uses to which it is applicable in the plastic state:—

"By itself it may be manufactured by moulding, stamping, embossing, casting, or any other known process or processes for giving figure and form to plastic substances, into various articles of use, as glass and picture-frames, cornices, mouldings, and other architectural ornaments, panelling, mosaics, &c.; buttons, studs, counters, labels, balls, &c.; bracelets, armlets, garters, rings, and other circular articles, reins, bridles, belts, bands, &c. Or it may be used (when sulphurized especially), for any purpose for which an elastic air and waterproof substance, unaffected by ordinary degrees of heat, is suitable, as, for example, as a material in which to produce pictures either in relief or in intaglio; or as a covering for beds, couches, and cushions; or as a material for billiard-table cushions, or as a substitute for metallic springs, or as a bearing for railway-rails and chairs, or parts of machinery, or as a material for atmospheric railway and other valves."

The patentee observes,—"There are other combinations in which the gutta percha is in its plastic state intimately mixed or blended with other materials, as, for example, there may be added to the gutta percha, while in the kneading-machine, paper-pulp, wood-dust, leather-dust, hair, bristles, oakum, &c.; and compound fabrics will be thus produced very suitable for paving, roofing, sheathing, and other purposes."

For example, we saw some planks formed of this curious material and saw-dust, which it was proposed to lay instead of boards, to produce a noiseless floor.

For taking some description of casts it is used in a granular state; the process is thus described in the specification:—"I take the gutta percha, of any of the varieties before described, that is to say, either plain, or sulphurized, or coloured, and rasp it down to a powder; I then apply it in this state to the taking of casts of busts, cornices, and other works of art, in round or curved forms, and to the producing of impressions in relief from surfaces engraved in intaglio; or perforated through and through any given pattern. When casts of busts, &c., are to be taken, the mould is filled with the grains or powder of the gutta percha, and then heated till the gutta percha becomes reduced to a mass sufficiently ductile to be pressed into all parts of the mould. When impressions in relief from flat surfaces, engraved or perforated as above, are to be taken, the surface is laid upon a flat table, and the powder sprinkled rather thickly over it; a straight-edge is then drawn across the surface, which causes all the sunken parts or holes to be filled up, and removes any superfluous powder from the raised parts. The surface is then subjected to a heat sufficient to soften the gutta percha, when the piece of cloth, leather, paper, or any other substance or material which may be desired to take the impression in relief, is laid upon the surface, and pressure applied to it by a roller or otherwise; the gutta percha leaves the broken parts, or holes, and attaches itself to the cloth or other substance, which then exhibits an exact copy, in very bold and durable relief, of the original subject." For one purpose or another, Gutta Percha can hardly fail to be extensively used.

LUTON TOWN HALL COMPETITION.

SIR,—As I consider your journal, from its extensive circulation amongst the members of the profession, eminently calculated to ameliorate the present absurd system of architectural competition, I inclose for insertion in THE BUILDER, copies of two letters that have passed between myself and the secretary of the Luton Town Hall Building Committee, who, you are aware, have lately advertised for designs in the public papers. The subject is one of particular interest just now, as several public architectural competitions are pending in London, Blackburne, and elsewhere, the terms of which, as laid down by their several committees, are most obnoxious to the interests of the profession; and this not from any sinister intentions on the part of these gentlemen, but a very naturally existent ignorance of what is required in such cases,—required as of honourable men, seeking the *implicit confidence* of the competitors, and also required for obtaining the very object they have in view, viz., the adoption of a good design, the employment of a good architect. The use of competition, its advantage to the public and the profession, is beyond question; its abuse most disastrous to each, as every day's experience serves to prove.

Your own columns, Sir, *after* a competition has been decided, teem with the querulous Jeremiads of the disappointed competitors, who, it occurs to me, are after all the main authors of their own mishap; for it rests with the profession themselves, and more especially the Institute of British Architects, to reform a system of public competition, which exacts every thing possible to advertise for, from the competitors, and guarantees *nothing whatever* to the luckless architects on the part of a committee, save sometimes a trifling premium, utterly inadequate to the value of the information sought. Witness the Blackburn competition, wherein, apparently, nothing but the premiums can be looked for; the Fishmongers and Poulterers', of which you will doubtless hear more; a Walworth competition, wherein the munificent sum of 5*l.* is offered; and last (and "least") the Luton Town-hall competition, wherein *nothing whatever* is offered, except a commission that is to grow "small by degrees and beautifully less," in proportion to the cupidity of the scrambling parties.

So much good may be effected by noticing these matters *before-hand*, that I feel no hesitation in handing you the correspondence in question, confident that, if you see the slightest impropriety in circulating it amongst your readers, you will suppress it.

On the appearance of the advertisement of the committee for building the Town-hall at Luton, Beds, I applied to the secretary, Mr. Williamson, for the particulars, as also to know

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